NUMB. XII.

The SPECTATOR.

—— Veteres avias tibi de pulmone revello. Per.

Wedneſday, March 14. 1711.

AT my coming to *London*, it was ſome time before I could ſettle my ſelf in a Houſe to my likeing. I was forced to quit my firſt Lodgings, by reaſon of an officious Landlady, that would be asking me every Morning how I had ſlept. I then fell into an honeſt Family, and lived very happily for above a Week; when my Land-lord, who was a jolly good-natur'd Man, took it into his Head that I wanted Company, and therefore would frequently come into my Chamber to keep me from being alone. This I bore for Two or Three Days; but telling me one Day that he was afraid I was melancholy, I thought it was high time for me to be gone, and accordingly took new Lodgings that very Night. About a Week after, I found my jolly Land-lord, who, as I ſaid before was an honeſt hearty Man, had put me into an Advertiſement of the *Daily Courant*, in the following Words. *Whereas a melancholy Man left his Lodgings on Thurſday laſt in the Afternoon, and was afterwards ſeen going towards* Iſlington; *If any one can give Notice of him to* R. B. *Fiſhmonger in the* Strand; *he ſhall be very well rewarded for his Pains.* As I am the beſt Man in the World to keep my own Counſel, and my Land-lord the Fiſhmonger not knowing my Name, this Accident of my Life was never diſcovered to this very Day.

I am now ſettled with a Widow-woman, who has a great many Children, and complies with my Humour in every thing. I do not remember that we have exchang'd a Word together theſe Five Years; my Coffee comes into my Chamber every Morning without asking for it; if I want Fire I point to my Chimney, if Water to my Baſon: Upon which my Land-lady nodds, as much as to ſay ſhe takes my Meaning, and immediately obeys my Signals. She has likewiſe model'd her Family ſo well, that when her little Boy offers to pull me by the Coat or prattle in my Face, his eldeſt Siſter immmediately calls him off and bids him not diſturb the Gentleman. At my firſt entering into the Family, I was troubled with the Civility of their riſing up to me every time I came into the Room; but my Land-lady obſerving that upon theſe Occaſions I always cried piſh and went out again, has forbidden any ſuch Ceremony to be uſed in the Houſe; ſo that at preſent I walk into the Kitchin or Parlour without being taken notice of, or giving any Interruption to the Buſineſs or Diſcourſe of the Family. The Maid will ask her Miſtreſs (tho' I am by) whether the Gentleman is ready to go to Dinner, as the Miſtreſs (who is indeed an excellent Houſewife) ſcolds at the Servants as heartily before my Face as behind my Back. In ſhort, I move up and down the Houſe and enter into all Companies, with the ſame Liberty as a Cat or any other domeſtick Animal, and am as little ſuſpected of telling any thing that I hear or ſee.

I remember laſt Winter there were ſeveral young Girls of the Neighbourhood ſitting about the Fire with my Land-lady's Daughters, and telling Stories of Spirits and Apparitions. Upon my opening the Door the young Women broke off their Diſcourſe, but my Land-lady's Daughters telling them that it was no Body but the Gentleman (for that is the Name which I go by in the Neighbourhood as well as in the Family) they went on without minding me. I ſeated my ſelf by the Candle that ſtood on a Table at one End of the Room; and pretending to read a Book that I took out of my Pocket, heard ſeveral dreadful Stories of Ghoſts as pale as Aſhes that had ſtood at the Feet of a Bed, or walked over a Church-yard by Moon-light: And of others that had been conjured into the *Red-Sea*, for diſturbing People's Reſt, and drawing their Curtains at Midnight; with many other old Womens Fables of the like Nature. As one Spirit raiſed another, I obſerved that at the End of every Story the whole Company cloſed their Ranks and crouded about the Fire: I took Notice in particular of a little Boy, who was ſo attentive to every Story, that I am miſtaken if he ventures to go to bed by himſelf this Twelvemonth. Indeed they talked ſo long, that the Imaginations of the whole Aſſembly were manifeſtly crazed, and I am ſure will be the worſe for it as long as they live. I heard one of the Girls, that had looked upon me over her Shoulder, asking the Company how long I had been in the Room, and whether I did not look paler than I uſed to do. This put me under ſome Apprehenſions that I ſhould be forced to explain my ſelf if I did not retire; for which Reaſon I took the Candle in my Hand, and went up into my Chamber, not without wondering at this unaccountable Weakneſs in reaſonable Creatures, who love to aſtoniſh and terrify one another. Were I a Father, I ſhould take a particular Care to preſerve my Children from theſe little Horrours of Imagination, which they are apt to contract when they are young, and

and are not able to ſhake off when they are in Years. I have known a Soldier that has enter'd a Breach, affrighted at his own Shadow; and look pale upon a little ſcratching at his Door, who the Day before had march'd up againſt a Battery of Cannon. There are Inſtances of Perſons, who have been terrify'd, even to Diſtraction, at the Figure of a Tree or the ſhaking of a Bull-ruſh. The Truth of it is, I look upon a ſound Imagination as the greateſt Bleſſing of Life, next to a clear Judgment and a good Conſcience. In the mean Time, ſince there are very few whoſe Minds are not more or leſs ſubject to theſe dreadful Thoughts and Apprehenſions, we ought to arm our ſelves againſt them by the Dictates of Reaſon and Religion, *to pull the old Woman out of our Hearts* (as *Perſius* expreſſes it in the Motto of my Paper,) and extinguiſh thoſe impertinent Notions which we imbibed at a Time that we were not able to judge of their Abſurdity. Or if we believe, as many wiſe and good Men have done, that there are ſuch Phantoms and Apparitions as thoſe I have been ſpeaking of, let us endeavour to eſtabliſh to our ſelves an Intereſt in him who holds the Reins of the whole Creation in his Hand, and moderates them after ſuch a Manner, that it is impoſſible for one Being to break looſe upon another without his Knowledge and Permiſſion.

For my own Part, I am apt to join in Opinion with thoſe who believe that all the Regions of Nature ſwarm with Spirits; and that we have Multitudes of Spectators on all our Actions, when we think our ſelves moſt alone: But inſtead of terrifying my ſelf with ſuch a Notion, I am wonderfully pleaſed to think that I am always engaged with ſuch an innumerable Society in ſearching out the Wonders of the Creation, and joining in the ſame Conſort of Praiſe and Adoration.

Milton has finely deſcribed this mixed Communion of Men and Spirits in Paradiſe; and had doubtleſs his Eye upon a Verſe in old *Heſiod*, which is almoſt Word for Word the ſame with his third Line in the following Paſſage.

——— Nor think, though Men were none,
That Heav'n would want Spectators, God want Praiſe:
Millions of ſpiritual Creatures walk the Earth
Unſeen, both when we wake and when we ſleep;
All theſe with ceaſeleſs Praiſe his Works behold
Both Day and Night. How often from the Steep
Of echoing Hill or Thicket, have we heard
Celeſtial Voices to the midnight Air,
Sole, or reſponſive each to others Note,
Singing their great Creator: Oft in Bands,
While they keep Watch, or nightly Rounding walk,
With heav'nly Touch of inſtrumental Sounds,
In full harmonick Number join'd, their Songs
Divide the Night, and lift our Thoughts to Heaven

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